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A

SERMON

Preached before the

KING

AT

WHITEHALL,

SUNDAY *January* 25. 168⅘.

Being the FEAST of St. *Paul's* Converſion.

By HENRY DOVE, D. D.
Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majeſty.

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Preached before the KING, &c.

Acts 16. 4, 5.

And as they went through the Cities, they delivered them the Decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the Apoſtles and Elders which were at Jeruſalem. And ſo were the Churches eſtabliſhed in the Faith, and increaſed in number daily.

AMong the ſundry Arguments which confirm the truth of the Goſpel, the ſucceſs it found in the world, and the wonderful effects it produced in the hearts and lives of the new Converts, has been always rightly

judged an evident demonſtration of its Divinity and Power: And indeed, had we no other evidence of its truth and efficacy, but what the inſtance of St. *Paul* affords us (for whoſe miraculous Converſion we this day glorifie God) his zeal, and courage, and conſtancy in the Faith, the continual labours and ſufferings of his life, from the time he was ſtopt in his Journey, to the laſt moment of it, were enough to prove it. For if we conſider what a ſtrange alteration was all of a ſudden wrought in him, how the ſtream of his words and actions and deſigns, were turned quite into another channel, and how he preached the Goſpel with all boldneſs, which once he endeavoured to deſtroy with the greateſt fury, we muſt needs conclude the efficacy of that Truth which wrought ſuch a change in him. A little before, we read how he aſſiſted at the ſhedding of the innocent bloud of St. *Stephen* the firſt Martyr, and ſhewed his conſent to his death by holding the garments of them that ſlew him; next what havock he made of the Church at *Jeruſalem*, entring into every houſe, and haling men and women to pri-

priſon, being implacably mad againſt all that called on the Name of Chriſt: And ſoon after this, we find him poſting to *Damaſcus* with Letters from the High Prieſt, breathing forth nothing but threatnings and ſlaughter againſt the Diſciples of our Lord. But now of a ravening Wolf that devoured the ſheep of Chriſt, he becomes a follower of the Lamb and a Paſtour of his flock; the furious Phariſee is turned into a zealous but meek Apoſtle, and inſtead of menacing death to the Chriſtians, none more ready than he to ſuffer the loſs of all things, and to lay down his life for the ſake of Chriſt and them. And what could induce him to forego his Acquaintance, Kindred, and Friends, his Reputation and Intereſt in the World, his enjoyments and hopes, and all the outward comforts of humane life together; and inſtead of theſe, to meet with nothing in exchange but troubles and dangers, perſecutions and poverty, bonds and afflictions, and death it ſelf, and to ſuffer all theſe with joy and gladneſs, but the conviction and light of his Conſcience, through the mighty influence of that heavenly voice,

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which ſmote him down to the ground, and entred even into his Soul, and the inconteſtable evidence of this great Goſpel-Truth, which is indeed the foundation of all the reſt he preached, That that very Jeſus whom he had perſecuted was Chriſt the Lord?

But that which is moſt for our preſent purpoſe, is, his unwearied diligence and zeal in the diſcharge of his Office, and ſpreading the Goſpel throughout the world; by which it is manifeſt how reſolved he was to teſtifie his Repentance among all Nations, and to make what amends he could for his former injuries and miſdoings: And here ſhould we follow him in his travels, we might ſooner be tired than relate with what winged ſpeed he compaſſed ſea and land to root out the Idolatry of the Nations, and to fetch in both Jews and Gentiles to the fold of Chriſt: what pains he took for almoſt forty years in planting and watering, in ſetling and governing the Church of God; how he laboured more abundantly in Word and Doctrine, in Journeys and Viſits, in Preaching and Writing than all his Brethren; for while the other Apoſtles ſpent the chief of their

their time and care in ſome particular Country, his Province was as large as the known world: Though their power was equal, yet the pains of St. *Paul* were multiplied, in that he had *the care of all the Churches*, confirming the faithful, and confuting the erroneous by the ſoundneſs and power of his Doctrine where-ever he came, and preſcribing ſuch rules of Diſcipline and Order, as were ſufficient to compoſe the differences which might or did ariſe, and to keep all Chriſtians in peace and unity to the worlds end.

An eminent inſtance of which, was his care in the firſt place of the Church at *Antioch*, which was greatly divided about Circumciſion and the Moſaic Rites, till St. *Paul* had ſetled it by procuring the decrees mentioned in the Text, and cauſing 'em to be kept throughout the Churches. And it is highly probable he was more than ordinarily inclined to begin with *Antioch*, that he might ſtop the progreſs of ſuch growing errours betimes, and leave an example to after-ages how the Church ſhould cure or prevent Schiſms.

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For the right underſtanding of which, and clearing the way to the words before us, give me leave a little to ſtate the caſe and open the queſtion that was now in hand: When the Religion of Chriſt began to gain ground in the world, as it was firſt preached at *Jeruſalem*, ſo the Jews were generally the firſt Converts; But when they perceived that God had opened the door of Faith to the Gentiles alſo, the Spirit which luſteth to Envy began to work afreſh among 'em, and though they had given up their names to Chriſt, yet they retained a reliſh of the old Leaven, being wonderfully in love with the Rites of *Moſes* ſtill: and hence the Jews at *Antioch*, and ſome of the Phariſees at *Jeruſalem*, who kept no doubt their old correſpondence, declared with one conſent, That *except the Gentiles were circumciſed* as well as themſelves, *they could not be ſaved:* But St. *Paul*, who knew their temper well by his own experience, ever ſince he was one of the ſame Sect, oppoſed 'em vehemently, diſputing and reaſoning the caſe with 'em; And when he ſaw they were deaf to Arguments, and reſolved to hold

hold the concluſion ſtill, he propoſes ſuch an expedient, as no man in reaſon can or ought to refuſe, that they would ſtand to the deciſion of their Superiours and Governours in the Church. To this they all conſented, as the moſt reaſonable thing imaginable; and therefore St. *Paul* and *Barnabas*, *and certain other of them* are haſtned away to *Jeruſalem*, to conſult *the Apoſtles and Elders* there *about this queſtion*; they forthwith aſſembled to conſider of it, and having heard and debated the whole matter, they gave their Sentence, and made their Decrees, and wrote their Letters to this effect: 'That the Jewiſh Converts were 'diſturbers of their Brethren without any 'cauſe or warrant, that St. *Paul* and *Barna-* 'bas had done what they ought in oppoſing 'their ſtrange Doctrine; That *Judas* and 'Silas were ſent to them on purpoſe to tell ''em at large by word of mouth, what was 'briefly contained in their Synodical Epiſtle; 'and in ſhort, that the Gentiles ſhould no 'more be moleſted about Circumciſion, but 'that it ſhould ſuffice for the preſent, if they 'obſerved what they profeſſed already, name-

'ly, the Precepts of the Sons of *Noah*. These Decrees being made, were immediately dispers'd among all the Churches depending on *Antioch* or *Jerusalem*, and particularly here by St. *Paul* & *Silas* through *Syria* and *Cilicia*, at *Derbe* and *Lystra* Cities of *Lycaonia*; And as they went through the Cities, & either visited the Churches they had already planted, or gathered new ones, *They delivered them the Decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the Apostles and Elders which were at Jerusalem: And so were the Churches established in the Faith, and increased in number daily.*

I am not ignorant, that the words thus open'd and explain'd, with relation to the context, would afford variety of Discourse, of Councils and Synods, of Mother-Churches and their dependencies, of Bishops and Pastours, and the Power committed to them by Christ (the great Bishop of our Souls) in things pertaining to God and his Church; of the duty of Inferiours, whether Clergy or Laity, in a meek submission to their just Authority and Discipline; of calling Assemblies, managing Debates, and deciding Controversies, and the like: But seeing these

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are Subjects much fitter for the Schools, or a-Convocation, than for the Pulpit, I ſhall mention 'em no further than as they fall in with the Text, wherein we may obſerve theſe three Propoſitions, that expreſs the main importance of it.

1. That Decrees may be made for the well ordering and governing the Church of Chriſt. *They delivered the Decrees which were ordained of the Apoſtles*, &c.

2. Decrees well made and promulgated ought to be kept; *They delivered them the Decrees*, which were ſufficiently made known by being delivered, and they deliver'd 'em to this end, *That they might be kept.*

3. Decrees well made and well kept, conduce very much to the eſtabliſhment and increaſe of the Church. *And ſo were the Churches eſtabliſhed in the Faith, and increaſed in number daily.* Of theſe I ſhall briefly ſpeak in their order, and then apply the whole with a word I hope in ſeaſon.

[1.] Decrees may be made for the well ordering and governing the Church of Christ: 'Tis evident that the Apostles and Elders here enacted such, and who doubts but they did what they ought to have done, and that they had power so to do? And if in those early days, when there were so many eminent persons qualified with extraordinary gifts and endowments, each one of which had both Wisdom and Authority sufficient to determine what was needful; If then it was judged the best expedient for composing differences in the Church, to appeal to the definitive sentence of the Church representative, and the sentence of their Governours, did finally conclude and quiet the Litigants, then doubtless 'tis a leading case for all succeeding Governours in the Church, when they are lawfully summoned and met together to do the like, and does not onely warrant their power in making such Decisions and Decrees, but is likewise the pattern of our ready compliance and submission to their just Injunctions: What was then deem'd necessary for the present exigence

exigence of affairs, may without all queſtion, upon an occaſion of the like nature, be done again? And though the extraordinary gifts of thoſe Primitive times be ceaſed, the work being long ſince done for which they were given, yet that the ordinary power of the Apoſtles and Elders continues ſtill in their Succeſſors, is plain from hence; becauſe the work for which that power was given is ſtill in doing, and will not be finiſhed till the end of all things: For while Chriſt was yet upon Earth he appointed the Apoſtles, and the Seventy; when he was riſen again from the dead, he confirmed and enlarged their Power; and when he was aſcended up on high (ſays St. *Paul*) *he gave ſome Apoſtles, and ſome Prophets, and ſome Evangeliſts, and ſome Paſtors and Teachers*, [Eph. 4. 11.] Some extraordinary for thoſe early ages, whoſe Calling and Office ceaſed when the Church was once increaſed; but leſt we ſhould think that the care of Chriſt was withdrawn from after Ages, the Apoſtle adds the Ordinary alſo, whoſe Errand it is to perform continually whatever is neceſſary *For the perfecting of the Saints, for the*

the work of the Miniſtry, for the edifying of the Body of Chriſt [v. 12.] And further ſtill, leſt any man ſhould think (as ſome of late have daringly affirmed) that their Calling alſo was onely Temporary, to laſt for a little time, till all ſhould be taught of God, and ſo become their own Paſtors, the Apoſtle ſeems to foreſee, and provides againſt ſuch Tenets, by ſecuring the ſtability of their power till the end of all things; for ſo he concludes [*v.* 13.] *Till we all come in the unity of the Faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the meaſure of the ſtature of the fulneſs of Chriſt.* As long as this world laſts, and men remain dwelling upon Earth, ſo long will Chriſt have a Church Militant here below; and as long as his Church is Militant here, ſo long will he maintain ſuch a Succeſſion and ſelect Order of men, ſuch Overſeers of his Flock, ſuch Paſtors and Teachers of his people, as may govern and guide 'em in the ways of truth and peace, and ſo conduct 'em to his everlaſting Kingdom. For ſo he aſſured his Apoſtles, when he ſent 'em forth to gather Diſciples of all Nations; *Go* (ſaith he)

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and remember that all power is given unto me in Heaven and in Earth; by that power I now ſend ye, by the ſame power I will protect and aſſiſt you and your Succeſſors; for, *lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world*,[St. Matth. 28.] Not with the Apoſtles in perſon; for they all finiſhed their courſe not long after, therefore with their Succeſſors: The ſame power which enabled them to perform their Apoſtolical Function while they lived, fitted them alſo for the ordaining of others, and the committing of a ſtanding power to a ſucceſſive Miniſtry, even unto the end of the world. How far this power extends, and in what it is chiefly to be exerciſed, is beſides my purpoſe to enquire here; I ſhall only conſider it in the leaſt and loweſt degree, as it relates to things indifferent, and is uſed in making Decrees for the maintaining of order and peace among us; for theſe (it ſeems) were ſome of the things which diſturbed the Church of *Antioch*; and theſe are the things which through the perverſe Diſputings of ſome that oppoſe themſelves, and deceive the Hearts of the ſimple, have ſadly divided the

the Church of *England*. Now we need (I conceive) no more than this, to convince the minds of such as seek and ensue Peace, [*That the Church hath power particularly to decree Rites and Ceremonies*] as our Articles express it; that either we must find every thing which respects the Worship of God already determined in the Scriptures, or we must all be left to our liberty in things that are not determined there, or there is a power inherent in the Church to determine such appendages of Worship as are not determined in the Scriptures.

To find every thing already determined in Scripture, needs very good eyes, and they that have made the most diligent search, are forced to confess they are not there: For though the Word of God be the undoubted immovable Rule of Faith and Manners, and therein he hath also prescribed how he will be worshipped, not only with the devotion of the inward, but the reverence of the outward man; and though under the Law, the very Form and Manner, as well as the Matter, of Publick Worship, was punctually expressed, yet under the Gospel it

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is not ſo; for the miniſtration of the Spirit has given us an enlargement; and our great Law-giver having once for all ſecured the Subſtance, has left the Adjuncts and Circumſtances of Chriſtian Worſhip, to the pious and prudent judgement of thoſe whom he has made the Overſeers of his Church; in whoſe determinations we are peaceably to acquieſce, leſt we diſcover a greater regard to our own private Fancies, than to the Duty we owe to our Governours, *who are ſet over us in the Lord.*

And ſeeing we have that general Canon of the Apoſtle, that *all things be done decently and in order*; as it cannot but ſeem reaſonable, that we conclude our Superiours the fitteſt to judge of what is ſuch; ſo being expreſly enjoyned *to ſubmit to every Ordinance of man for the Lords ſake*, and *to obey them that have the rule over us in the Lord*, our Obedience to ſuch Injunctions and Decrees, muſt needs be thought *a reaſonable ſervice.*

But then, where God does not bind us, why ſhould we bind our ſelves? Where

things are not determined by Scripture, are we not all left to our own liberty, and hath not Christ made us free? This is the usual pretence and Scruple of those that separate themselves upon this score. To which I answer briefly; 1. That Christ hath freed us indeed from the Yoke of legal Observances, and from all opinion of their obligation or necessity; but then he hath withal enjoyned us submission to our lawful Governours and Pastours, and we must not use our liberty as a cloak for our craftiness and disobedience: And though all things are lawful now to Christians, as if the Ceremonial Law had never been given; yet what is expedient for the furtherance of Uniformity, is left to our Governours to determine. 2. That in some things we are altogether free, yea in all, where God or Nature do not restrain us, or where authority does not interpose for the sake of Unity and Peace; but that in every thing we should be left to our liberty, is so wild a conceit, as needs no other confutation than the sad experience of the disorders and disturbances that have hapned, where Tolerations have

have made men extravagant, and Liberty licentious: the effect of which has been as bad or worſe, as the Apoſtle taxed the *Corinthians* with, [1 *Cor.* 14. 26.] *While every one has a Pſalm, has a Doctrine, has a Tongue, has a Revelation, has an Interpretation.* A confuſion ſo great, as gave juſt occaſion to the Unbelievers and Prophane, to ſay *they were mad* [v. 23.] and ſo worthy the Apoſtles ſevere reprehenſion, that it occaſioned that ſtanding and unalterable Rule in the Church of God, *Let all things be done decently and in order; Let all things be done to edifying.* To this I onely add, that there never was, nor at this day is, a conſtituted Church upon Earth, but what hath exerciſed the ſame power for concluding their own Members: This the Fathers declare the Councils all along have practiſed, according to the pattern of the Apoſtles themſelves in this firſt Council at *Jeruſalem.* And ſuch was the meek and ſubmiſſive temper of Chriſtians in thoſe days, that without diſputing the Authority which made the Decrees, or quarrelling at the lawfulneſs of the things enjoyned, they freely acqui-

eſced, and joyfully complied with 'em. Which leads me to the

[2] Propoſition, *That Decrees well made and promulgated ought to be kept.* I ſay, well made, that we may not flatter Humanity ſo far, unleſs it be inſpired from above, as to count it infallible; it is ſufficient in all humane Conſtitutions, that our Superiours be morally aſſured of the goodneſs or expediency of what they enjoyn; and if their Decrees be delivered, or otherwiſe publiſhed, being firſt adviſedly made, either agreeable to the rules of Decency and Order, or conducing to the ends of Unity and Peace, they ought to be as ſtrictly obſerved as they were ſolemnly enacted; that is, They are

1. To be kept and preſerved, and 2. obeyed and practiſed; for the word without any ſtraining will bear very well both ſences.

(1.) They are to be kept & preſerv'd as uſeful Records, to which we may have recourſe in caſe of doubt or difficulty: For, alas! we are

are all but of yeſterday, and know (as it were) nothing; little to be ſure without the information of thoſe that have gone before us, who have left the effects of their Piety and Wiſdom behind, for the benefit and example of Poſterity: And if there has been a Church, and men of great Holineſs and Learning have flouriſhed in it long before we were born, how ſhall we be able to know the mind of former Generations, or copy out their patterns of Virtue, or converſe with thoſe of fore-going Ages, unleſs the Writings of Learned men, and much more the Decrees of venerable Councils be carefully preſerved, that ſo we may firſt know, and then *earneſtly contend for the Faith which was once delivered to the Saints*, then written by the will of God in the Scriptures, and has been propagated downwards unto us by theſe means. To the Book of God we look in the firſt place, which is *able to make us wiſe unto Salvation*, being *thoroughly furniſhed* thence *to every good word and work*; and if any doubt ariſe in the interpretation, we refer our ſelves to the firſt and pureſt Antiquity:

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To Chriſt alone, as the great Authour and finiſher of our Faith, and the directour of our Lives; To the Apoſtles and Evangeliſts, as the firſt Preachers and Writers of his and their own acts; To the primitive Fathers and Councils, as the beſt Keepers and Interpreters of the whole. This was the Rule moſt religiouſly obſerved by *our holy Mother*, in the happy reformation of her Doctrine, Diſcipline, and Government truly Apoſtolical; in her Homilies and Articles, Conſtitutions and Decrees, Orthodox and Godly, Pure and Peaceable. And I take the boldneſs to add, that this is enough under the protection of God and the King, to preſerve her ſtill in unity and peace, and to ſecure her always from all the innovations and corruptions of any uſurping or dividing Sect. And bleſſed be God that we have ſuch Helps and Writings of the Ancients in ſo great a meaſure ſafe and uncorrupt, that all the Monuments of Antiquity are not fallen into the hands of *Goths* and *Vandals*, nor yet incloſed within the Walls of the envious *Vatican*; That Providence has in all Ages raiſed up ſuch perſons

perſons as have been inſtrumental to preſerve the Records of the Church as well as the Scriptures, not only from Moths and Worms, but from the more malicious corruptions of an *Expurgatory Index*. But is there then no better uſe to be made of Decrees, than Antiquaries make of duſty Monuments, who keep 'em only to look on, or to ſhew to others? Yes without doubt, much better. For,

2. They are made and preſerved that they may be practiſed; for this indeed is the true keeping of 'em, and the deſign of making 'em: and if every thing is to be eſteemed according to the value of its end, then theſe of all things were made to little purpoſe, if not to be obey'd and practiſed. For as bonds are not made to ſhew that men can write, but to carry an obligation with 'em, ſo are Decrees and Canons ordained, not onely to be committed to writing, but as Laws to be put in execution; not made barely as evidences of the Superiours power, but as the Rule of our obedience. When a Law is made, it is always intended as a Rule of their actions to whom it is given, and hence obedi-

obedience is at once the end and the perfection alſo of a Law; for when it takes effect by being duly obſerved, then and not till then it receives its final accompliſhment; it is what it ought to be, when the ſubject *executes* what the giver of the Law *intended.* I ſpeak not only of ſmaller injunctions, though theſe alſo, where the matter is good, or at leaſt indifferent, and the Authority ſufficient, oblige the inferiour to obedience; but of thoſe chiefly which after mature deliberation had, are paſſed into *publick Acts*, and have received their force and obligation from the Supreme and Imperial Power; to which the people themſelves have virtually given their conſent beforehand, and are always ſuppoſed by the reaſon of the thing, to be afterwards concluded by 'em: And when ſuch as theſe are once enacted and fixed for the good of the community, for men to ſtick, or draw back, to boggle and diſpute, or elſe to pick and chooſe which they will obey and which not, what is it elſe, but to ſet up themſelves as Judges of the Law, to make their own intereſt, or humour, or pride the Standard of the

the Publick, and even to be falſe to their own Acts? what is it elſe but tacitly at leaſt to reproach their Soveraign, as though he had done what he ought not, to make his Authority vile and contemptible among the people, to ſet an ill example to their fellow-Subjects, who may equally claim the like exemption, to contradict the reaſon and end of all Conſtitutions, and overthrow the foundations of all Government both in Church and State?

But is there no allowance then to be made for private Conſciences, for men that are *tender*, or *weak*, or *doubtful*, or *erroneous*? I put 'em together, becauſe though they differ in the notion, yet they uſually agree in their diſobedience, and a brief anſwer will ſerve 'em all, whether the allegation be real, or onely in pretence. If Conſcience be only pretended, I need not tell, what horrid things have been done in the Land under this diſguiſe, nor yet how eaſie it is for every crafty or deſigning perſon to put on the ſame cloak: it is well known how oft it has been made the great *Palladium* of Sedition and Schiſm, of Rapine and

Sacriledge, of Treaſon and Murder, and what not? and if we wanted inſtances of a later date, which yet are freſh and reeking, there is a day at hand, I mean the *Thirtieth of this Month*, wherein they are all exemplified with horrour. But admit the mans Conſcience be really *tender*, that is, to ſpeak properly, timorous of offending God the great Law-giver; How comes his duty to Governours to be forgotten in the caſe? is not this a part of the Divine Law? and can there be a greater offence againſt this part, as plain and ſacred as the reſt, than what is committed againſt the Parent of our Country, and Gods Vicegerent upon earth? whoſe Authority by his own appointment is ſecond to his own, and muſt not by any means be left out in the account. Put the caſe again, his Conſcience be *weak*, that is, ignorant or uninſtructed in his duty; what better ſecurity can ſuch an one have, than the Laws to direct him, and the wiſdom of his Governours to inſtruct him? if he be ſo weak, that he knows not what to do for himſelf, who fitter to be his Guardian than he that protects and takes care of him, who more likely

ly or able to teach him, than his lawful guides, *whoſe lips preſerve knowledge?* But what if he be *doubtful* and unreſolved, leaſt he may probably ſin, in this or that inſtance of obedience? How comes he to doubt of one ſide onely? to find faults and flaws in the Laws, and none in his own breaſt? Let him lay the obligations he has to obedience in one ſcale, and all his doubts and ſcruples in the other, and if Authority cannot incline the ballance, 'tis a ſign he makes a very light thing of it: But whether it move him or no, this is certain, that a bare probability on one hand, can never diſcharge him from obeying an expreſs precept on the other: The rule of his duty is fixed, his opinion is confeſſed to be in ſuſpenſe; let the certain duty determine the uncertain and nice opinion. And as for the caſe of *erroneous* Conſciences, it ſcarce deſerves to be conſidered, becauſe Arguments or Counſel here can get no admittance; for though they be all miſtaken, and ſometimes as oppoſite to each other, as they are contrary to truth, yet none are willing to confeſs themſelves in the wrong: were that but once acknowledged as it ought, the way would be opened for

better information, and the power of reaſon would ſoon prevail. But ſtill I confeſs this is the moſt perplexing caſe that a man can poſſibly bring himſelf into, ſince he muſt needs run himſelf into ſin, whether he follows his Conſcience, or goes againſt it: if he ſuffers it to lead him while he continues in his errour, having means ſufficient to rectifie his judgment, though his perſwaſion be never ſo ſtrong, the man is nevertheleſs a ſinner; for otherwiſe St. *Paul* before his Converſion, while *he verily thought with himſelf, that he ought to do many things contrary to the Nome of Jeſus*, muſt be accounted innocent; though afterwards (we know) he confeſſed himſelf upon that ſcore to be *the chief of ſinners*: If he goes againſt it, though he be in an errour, he is deemed notwithſtanding to ſin againſt his Conſcience, becauſe he reſiſts the beſt light he has at preſent, & would in all probability do the ſame, ſhould he happen to have better.

An hard caſe indeed, for which he may thank his falſe Teachers or himſelf, or both together: And this one would think were enough to make a man jealous over the importu-

portunities of his Conſcience with a godly jealouſie when ever it tempts him to gainſay the Eſtabliſhed Laws; to root out of his mind prejudice and paſſion, and by reſpects, and to open his ear to the charitable inſtruction of his Superiours; to make him ſit down and calmly conſider what a ſad condition he is in, and by what evil principles he came to be ſeduced into it; for here he may aſſuredly conclude, this is none of the ways of God, but ſome corruption of his own heart or life; for God cannot be the Author of ſin, much leſs neceſſitate his Creature to run into it. But ſince there is no end of asking Queſtions, and raiſing Scruples, it is time we haſten to conſider,

The benefit that accrues to the Church, by the due making and keeping of Decrees, which is the Third Propoſition from the Text, and is here expreſſed in a double inſtance.

[1.] In the confirmation of ſuch as are already Believers. And

[2.] In gaining new Converts to the Faith, *And ſo were the Churches*, &c. Of which I ſhall ſpeak as briefly as may be, that I may leave a little room for as ſhort an Application of the whole. The

The mind of man in Religion, before it is well inſtructed and grounded, is a very uncertain thing, doubtful which way to incline, and what it ſhould moſt adhere to; and as in matters of Faith, there are divers and ſtrange winds of Doctrine, whereby they that are unlearned and unſtable are toſs'd to and fro; ſo in matters of practice, there are numberleſs Rites and uſages, which as all cannot be obſerved, ſo neither can all be omitted; and therefore to determine what are needful and becoming, no better ſatisfaction to a ſincere Chriſtian, than there to acquieſce where his Superiours have interpoſed their Wiſdom and Authority, as fitteſt to judge, and moſt likely to know what may lawfully be done in ſuch caſes, and what is at once moſt agreeable both to the *purity* and *peaceableneſs* of our holy Religion.

And while the ſcrupulous Diſſenter trifles away his zeal, and miſpends his ſpirits in contending about the Rites and Circumſtantials of Religion, the humble and peaceable perſon, that with a meek ſubmiſſion performs what he finds enjoyned, which he is ſure can never

never be ſinful, being no way repugnant to the Law of God, feels more of the life and power of inward Chriſtianity, and diſcovers more of that bleſſed temper of the Primitive Saints, who were ſo far from diſobeying or repining at the Decrees of their Superiours, that *they rejoyced at the conſolation* [*c.* 15. 31.] they were glad at their hearts to have their differences thus compoſed, that ſo they might live in peace, and ſerve God together as one man. That was one happy effect of their Superious deciſion, *the Churches* thereby *were eſtabliſhed in the Faith.*

[2.] In gaining new Converts, and wining men over to the true Religion; *they increaſed in number daily.* As no greater ſcandal to Religion than Diſſentions and Differences among them that pretend to it, eſpecially when men boggle at things which the Church declares to be *indifferent in themſelves*, and *neceſſary only as to uſe* for peace and comlineſs-ſake; ſo no greater impediment to the gaining of Proſelites, ſince that profeſſion may juſtly be ſuſpected by ſtrangers, where they that ſhould adorn it by

by the meekneſs and ſubmiſſion of their tempers, are either quarrelling with their fellows, or murmuring at their Governours: But where unity and agreement appear in the life, it brings credit and votaries to the Doctrine, and makes men honour the profeſſion; and then does Religion appear in the beauty of holineſs, when righteouſneſs and peace, obedience & charity do kiſs each other. So much does order and unity promote our common profeſſion, ſo much *does the making and keeping Decrees* for that end, *conduce to the eſtabliſhment and increaſe of the Church.*

I ſhut up all with two or three inferences, and ſo commend you to the grace of God.

1. *If Decrees may be made for the well governing and ordering of the Church of Chriſt*, how unreaſonable then are they who ſeparate themſelves from the Communion of the Eſtabliſhed Church, becauſe ſhe makes ſuch Decrees for the regulating and edifying her own Members; nay who alleadge this as the chief, if not the onely reaſon why they forſake her, becauſe ſhe makes

makes ſuch Decrees to be kept? If they might be left to their own choice, perhaps they would obſerve the things which ſhe enjoyns; but the very enjoyning 'em (it ſeems) is that which troubles 'em, and which makes 'em cry out of burdens laid upon their Conſciences which they are not able to bear. To theſe I have many things to ſay, which I ſhall briefly comprize in this ſhort disjunction. If our Governours have not power to chooſe and enjoyn ſuch indifferent things as they judge moſt convenient for Order and Unity, then they have no power at all to enjoyn any thing: for what is commanded of God in his Word, they cannot forbid; what is forbidden there, they cannot command; their power extends not to theſe things, nor can the worſt of their enemies ſay they ever claim'd it: Wherefore one of theſe two muſt needs follow, either that their power extends to thoſe things which are neither commanded nor forbidden, or that it extends to none at all: If any man be ſo hardy as to ſay, that his Governours have no power at all, the Magiſtrate is fitter to decide that point

than the Minister; if he allows 'em to have any, then he must needs confess 'tis in those things which are of an indifferent nature according to the rules of decent Order and godly Discipline, such as are generally laid down in the Scripture, and sufficient for any sober and peaceable Christian to warrant his practice of 'em.

2. If *Decrees well made ought to be kept*, then let those who allow the principle be exhorted seriously to consider what obligation they are under to shew their conformity to such Decrees, for the sake of their own and the Churches peace, and for the benefit of others, that so they may be induced to follow their good example. We have seen by a long and lamentable experience how much Religion has suffered since the Discipline and Decrees of the Church lost their esteem, not onely by the open quarrels of those that reject 'em, but also by the coldness or negligence, or indifferency of some that pretend to approve 'em. I cannot stay to name all the particulars, but shall onely

inſtance in thoſe orders which concern our publick Prayers: If we careleſly abſent our ſelves from 'em, or when we are preſent behave our ſelves irreverently as though we were no ways concern'd in 'em, what do we elſe but put a new Objection into the mouths of deſerters, and alienate their affections ſo much the more from our Communion? For this is a natural conſequence, and it turns with ſome force upon us, if theſe people that pretend ſo much to love the Orders and Prayers of the Church make ſo light of 'em, we cannot but judge, that while they neglect 'em themſelves or perfunctorily perform 'em, they confirm us in our Opinion, that there is no great benefit to be obtained by 'em: Wherefore that we lend 'em no ſuch Objection nor ſcandalize the Church whereof we are Members, let us conſtantly frequent 'em; and Religiouſly joyn our Devotion in 'em, with the hearty affection of the inward, and the reverent behaviour of the outward man; and in both let us keep the Derees and Rules which the Church hath ordained, that God in all things may be

glorified in ours *as in all the Churchees of the Saints.*

3. If *the keeping Decrees conduce* ſo much *to the good* and welfare *of the Church*, then hence we learn once for all, which is the beſt expedient either for enuring diviſions, or for reſtoring and eſtabliſhing Peace among us; even the ſame which the Apoſtles themſelves put in practice; of the ſame age and preſcription with Chriſtianity it ſelf. And while divers men for ſome little ends are pleaſing themſelves with divers ſchemes and models of their own deviſing, which are too well known to be here recited, we have reaſon to bleſs God who hath put it into the heart of our Governours to ſhew 'em all *a more excellent way*, not to let down the Laws to the humours of the people, which at firſt hearing ſounds abſurdly, but to bring up the people, to the meaſure of the Laws, which needs no proving, and ſpeaks for it ſelf.

And as we doubt not but God is pleaſed with the enforcement of thoſe Laws in par-

particular, which provide for the ſolemnity and decency of his own worſhip; as we are well aſſured that God hears the Prayers which are daily made before him with the uniform devotion of all the good Chriſtians throughout the Realm, ſince he hath ſo often anſwer'd 'em with a moſt remarkable bleſſing, in giving deliverance to *his Church*, protection and ſtrength and ſafety to *his Anointed*; ſo we are hence encouraged to hope that they will find but few, who ſhall preſume to oppoſe 'em any longer, when the Supreme Pleaſure upon Earth is likewiſe generally known, and that it ſhall be ſo and ſo done to the Cauſe and to the Church, to the Perſons and the Intereſt, which the King himſelf is reſolved to maintain, and thus delighteth to Honour.

Now the God of Patience and Conſolation grant you to be like minded one towards another according to Chriſt Jeſus: That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorifie God even the Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. And I beſeech you (Brethren) by the ſame prevailing Name, *that ye all ſpeak the ſame thing, and that there be no diviſions among you; but that*

ye

ye be perfectly joyned together in the same mind, and in the same judgment. 'Tis the Prayer and the Exhortation of St. *Paul*, the one for the *Romans*, the other to the *Corinthians*; and I cannot conclude better than in Praying again as our Church hath prescribed, *That we may shew forth our thankfulness unto God for his wonderful Conversion, by following the* Counsel and *holy Doctrine which he taught, through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

FINIS.